

From flight line to front line

USARCENT, medical battalion move, fix critical supplies

Staff Sgt. Alex Licea

Third Army/U.S. Army Central Public Affairs Office

Numbers are a big part in the day-to-day operations for Soldiers who handle medical supplies and equipment maintenance in Iraq.

The 377th Theater Support Command and Third Army/U.S. Army Central (USARCENT), the Army component for the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), working at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, are responsible for the logistics support for military assets entering Iraq, Afghanistan and in areas across the Middle East and Central Asia.

Maj. David Hammer, medical logistics officer for Third Army/USARCENT, sets the policy for medical logistics entering the CENTCOM theater. Hammer said most of the supplies travel to Company A, 32nd Multifunctional Medical Battalion (32nd MMB) from Fort Bragg, N.C.

As a support operations officer for the 32nd MMB, Maj. Christopher David analyzes more than \$10 million worth of medical equipment and supplies being shipped and distributed into Iraq, and tracks more than 615,000 pounds of cargo per month supporting more than 450 units. There is the added pressure of coordinating and tracking dozens of ground and air movements leaving each day to six forward distribution teams that dispense medical supplies. But, there is only one number David looks at.

"The only figure I care about is decreasing the waiting time of units receiving their medical supplies," said David, a father of two. "Although we have a good turnaround time from request to delivery of the product, there is always room for improvement. That's what's important ... getting the right product to the right unit in the fastest time."

The 32nd MMB serves a major supply and distribution center in Iraq. Its distribution teams, located in separate medical shipment hubs, stock

everything from bandages to blood.

"We receive up to 400 customer requests a day," said Spc. Mathavy Yasa, a logistic specialist, who works for the control and request center of 32nd MMB. "We ensure that we are not only tracking the items but that they get to their final destination. The follow-up is key!"

The unit is also responsible for the medical equipment maintenance in Iraq and shipping blood to patients in need within hours of an emergency.

Army and Air Force assets based in Kuwait, Qatar and Germany account for 70 percent of the movement of medical supplies into Iraq, Afghanistan and the Horn of Africa daily.

Most of these supplies are housed at and flown in from the United States

Medical Material Management Center-Southwest Asia (USAMMC-SWA), also under USARCENT's control. The medical distribution center is 65,000 square feet – bigger than a football field.

"The center stocks more than 2,700 lines of medical supplies," said Lt. Col. Jonathan Branch, commander of the USAMMC-SWA. "We have the ability to stock and supply the major hospitals in Iraq and Afghanistan with what they need."

USAMMC-SWA is operated by more than 80 Soldiers who work three eight-hour shifts, seven days a week.

Branch said the workflow is essential because

combat support hospitals and medical units across Iraq and Afghanistan request supplies all day.

After the cargo is packed and placed on pallets, it's taken by air to its destinations.

"Medical logistics is not perfect, but we are all a team and make it work," said David. "All of our efforts are interrelated. The USAMMC-SWA in Qatar, the USAMMC-Europe in Germany and the 32nd MMB collaborate supply units as quickly as possible."

"On average," Hammer said, "USARCENT transports 450,000 pounds of medical supplies each month across the theater. That equals 15,000 pounds a day."

When supplies are moved, military and civilian personnel hold the cargo in 35,000-square-foot warehouses before distribution by air to troop clinics. Ground transportation is used one-third of the time. With the consistent threat of improvised explosive devices, ground movement is being reduced.

"We are trying very hard to maximize air assets to get us off the roads," said David. "However, sometimes the only way we can receive anything is by convoy."

Despite the seriousness of their work and having 10 months at home between combat tours, the 32nd MMB may be a cohesive group of Soldiers with the wittiest personalities.

"We have a great bunch of Soldiers here," said Sgt. 1st Class Corey Lord, noncommissioned officer-in-charge of the medical maintenance section, as Soldiers joked and laughed in the background. "I've been with this unit five years and it's been a great time."

"For us, it's about making sure the customers have everything they need at all times," added David.

"The efforts save lives every day."



Spc. Jasmine Bryant, controlled substance specialist, 32nd MMB, inventories and stockpiles controlled substances in a locked vault. The College Park native is responsible for shipping and accountability.



Photo by Staff Sgt. Alex Licea

Spc. Shawn Johnson, a medical lab technician with the 32nd Multifunctional Medical Battalion (32nd MMB) scans a unit of blood before handing it to Staff Sgt. Patrick Kaer, platoon sergeant of the medical lab team. The battalion currently stocks up to 1,000 units of blood at any given time and can pack, ship, track and deliver the critical units of blood to hospitals around Iraq in less than four hours and as fast as two.